THE OUTCOME OF DEBATE IN RELATION TO GENDER, SIDE AND POSITION

Nathan Rosen, Larry Dean, and Frank Willis

Research on the relationship of factors other than skill to the outcome of debates has been limited. Wise[1] found that the number of wins for the affirmative and negative positions in intercollegiate debates was approximately equal. He also examined judges' scoring of six qualities: analysis, reasoning, evidence, organization, refutation, and delivery. He does not present his tests of statistical significance, but he does present higher overall mean scores for winners than losers, for second position over first position on the affirmative side, and affirmative over negative with the exception of first position losers. Hayes and McAdoo[2] stated that many debate coaches throughout the country hold the belief that the male debater is superior. They examined judges' rankings of college debaters and found that females are more likely to receive a rank of one and males were more likely to receive a rank of four. However, Hensley and Strother[3] analyzed data from various colleges which participated in a debate tournament over a six year period. They found that neither male nor female teams were significantly likely to win or lose, but that mixed gender teams were more likely to win with a difference that approached significance ($p = .07$).

The methods used in the studies above had several limitations. All three were based upon data from college debates. Wise collected data from seven tournaments, yet he analyzed data from only two of them. He does not report the rationale for selecting the two. In addition, only one debate topic was involved. Hayes and McAdoo examined ballots only from debates in which at least one team was composed of a male and a female. No male-male or female-female teams were involved. They reported only ranking data; quality point data were not presented. The Hensley and Strother study did not examine debates with closed systems. A closed system represents, in this study, a debate tournament where each debate is analyzed for the relevant data. For every win there is a loss; for every affirmative team, a negative team; for every person ranked 1, a person is ranked 2, 3 and 4.

The present study was designed to do the following: 1) provide data from a different population, i.e., high school debaters; 2) analyze debater ranking and quality points in addition to won-lost records; 3) use data from closed debate systems, and 4) examine outcomes from more than one debate topic.

METHOD

Subjects. Three high school debate tournaments held in the greater Kansas

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[1] C. N. Wise, "Relationship Among Certain Rating Judgments on the Form C Ballot," *Journal of the American Forensic Association,* 7 (Spring 1971), 305-308.

[2] M. T. Hayes and J. McAdoo, "Debate Performance: Differences Between Male and Female Rankings," *Journal of the American Forensic Association,* 8 (Winter, 1972), 127-131.

[3] W. E. Hensley and D. B. Strother, "Success in Debate, *Speech Teacher,* 17 (September 1968), 235-237.

City area were examined. A total of 155 debaters served as subjects. The first tournament included debaters from the greater Kansas City area as well as debaters from other areas of Kansas and Missouri. The second tournament qualified the winners to compete at the national N.F.L. championship debate tournament. The third tournament qualified the top teams to compete in the Missouri State debate tournament with the opportunity to compete in the national tournament. Missouri debate results were selected simply because they were convenient to the authors. A survey of local debate coaches indicates that Missouri teams have ranked near the median in the nation for the past three years.

Procedure. The first tournament consisted of five rounds with 113 useable ballots. Two ballots were not useable because of forfeits. The second tournament included five rounds with 78 ballots. The third tournament included four rounds with 64 ballots. Two debate topics were involved to reduce the chance that topic might interact with the three independent variables, gender, side and position. The side (affirmative or negative) winning each round was recorded. The total number of males and females taking part was recorded as was the number of male-male, female-female, and male-female teams. Won-lost records for the three sex combinations were recorded. Speaker rank was compared to sex of debater, side and position. Quality points (25 point ballots) similarly were compared to sex, side and position.

RESULTS

The affirmative teams won 133 rounds compared to 112 for the negative teams (Table 1). The proportion of wins and losses for affirmative and negative sides did not differ for the two topics. A Chi-Square test of goodness of fit did not reveal a reliable difference between these records. Table 2 displays the number of wins and losses by tournament. There was no reliable difference in this proportion (X^2 (2) = .58, p <.05). Wise[4] using 2,024 ballots, found 1,034 affirmative wins and 990 negative wins. His difference also did not reach significance.

TABLE 1

FREQUENCY OF WINS BY POSITION AND TOPIC

	NUMBER OF WINS	
Topics	Affirmative	Negative
I	60	53
II	73	69

TABLE 2

FREQUENCY OF WINS BY POSITION AND TOURNAMENT

	NUMBER OF WINS	
Tournaments	Affirmative	Negative
I	38	40
II	60	53
III	35	29

Previous studies have found that more males than females take part in debate. Hayes and McAdoo[5] reported that 59% of their sample was male. Hensley and Strother[6] had 79% in their sample. In the present study 65% were male. We examined our data to determine whether assignment of debaters to teams was related to gender. We found that the number of male-male, female-female, and male-female teams did not differ from chance considering the total number of males, females and teams in our samples. We examined the won-lost records in relation to the sex composition of the teams. This information is presented in Table 3. The mixed-sex teams were likely to have won their debates (X^2 (2) = 7.96, p <.02). Hensley and Strother[7] obtained a difference in the same direction, but in their study the difference was significant at only the .07 level of confidence.

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[4] Wise, p. 306.

[5] Hayes and McAdoo, p. 130.

[6] Hensley and Strother, p. 235.

[7] Hensley and Strother, p. 236.

TABLE 3

Frequency of Winning and Losing in Relation to Gender

GENDER OF DEBATERS	NUMBER OF WINS	NUMBER OF LOSSES
Female-Male	47	28
Female-Female	17	22
Male-Male	32	46

We examined the won-lost records of teams in relation to the ranks assigned to the team members. The teams whose members were ranked 1 and 2 or 1 and 3 always won, as we might expect, and conversely, teams receiving ranks of 3 and 4 or 2 and 4 always lost. A "Split Decision" occurs when one team receives a 1-4 and the other team a 2-3. When there is a split decision, the negative team, whether receiving the 1-4 or the 2-3, won significantly more debates. We found that the combined split-decision teams won 8 and lost 16 debates with the affirmative side and won 16 and lost 8 with the negative side. (X^2 (1) = 5.33, $p < .05$). When all the 1-4 team records were combined and compared to the 2-3 team records, the team that received the 1-4 rankings won significantly more debates (X^2 (1) = 5.33, $p < .05$). It might appear that the use of repeated measures could result in a particular skillful debater accounting for most of the negative wins. However, in a closed or balanced system, the highly skillful debater would appear equally as often in the affirmative side. It appears that when two teams are balanced in rank, the negative side has an advantage. The superiority of the 1-4 teams over the 2-3 teams would seem to indicate that the top-ranked debater has a very important influence on the judges.

The frequencies of the four ranks received in relation to the gender of the debater is presented in Table 4. There appears to be a tendency for males to be second ranked, but the difference is not significant (X^2 (3) = 5.12, NS).

TABLE 4

Judges' Rankings in Relation to Gender

GENDER OF DEBATER	NUMBER OF EACH RANK ASSIGNED:			
	First	Second	Third	Fourth
Female	65	47	64	63
Male	105	125	102	109

The distribution of assigned ranks was examined in relation to side (Table 5). Members of the affirmative team were more likely to receive a rank of 1 or 2 while members of the negative team were more likely to receive a rank of 3 or 4 (X^2 (3) = 13.44, $p < .05$).

TABLE 5

Judges' Rankings in Relation to Side

	NUMBER IN RELATION TO SIDE:			
SIDE	First	Second	Third	Fourth
Affirmative	98	99	76	73
Negative	75	74	97	100

The distribution of ranks was examined in relation to position (Table 6). Those who spoke first were more likely to receive a rank of 2 or 4, while those who spoke second were more likely to receive a rank of 1 or 3 (X^2 (3) = 19.26, $p < .01$). The second position seems to have an advantage.

TABLE 6

Judges' Ranking in Relation to Position

	NUMBER OF EACH RANK ASSIGNED:			
POSITION	First	Second	Third	Fourth
First	67	95	75	103
Second	103	77	91	69

The final data analysis involved quality points. The two genders, two positions and two sides were combined to create a 1 between and 2 within analysis of variance. None of the main effects or interactions approached significance, the highest F being 1.59, df = 1,12 for the main effect of side (Table 7). Cell means of quality points (Table 8) ranged from 16.75 for females in the second affirmative to 18.88 for males in the second affirmative. None of the cell means was significantly different from means for the remainder of the group.

TABLE 7

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR QUALITY POINTS BY SIDE, POSITION AND GENDER

Source	*df*	*MS*	*F*
Between Subjects	153	—	—
Gender (G)	1	5.11	1.24
error	152	4.13	—
Within Subjects	87	—	—
Side (S)	1	5.04	1.59
S x G	1	1.11	.35
error	12	3.17	—
Position	1	.73	.14
P x G	1	4.15	.80
error	12	5.19	—
S x P	1	2.15	1.05
G x S x P	1	1.20	.59
error	57	2.04	—
TOTAL	239	—	—

TABLE 8

MEAN QUALITY POINTS BY GENDER, POSITION AND SIDE

	FEMALE	MALE
First Speaker		
Affirmative	18.05	18.24
Negative	17.28	17.05
Second Speaker		
Affirmative	16.75	18.88
Negative	17.29	17.38

DISCUSSION

The opinion of some debate coaches that males are superior to females in debate is apparently based upon prejudice rather than fact. Male superiority was not supported in previous studies using college samples (Hensley and Strother;[8] Hayes and McAdoo[9]) or in the present study using high school samples. What we can say with regard to sex differences in debate is that mixed-sex teams appear to be superior, as indicated by the won-lost records in the present study and in the Hensley and Strother[10] study. An examination of neither won-lost records, rankings nor quality points reveals a sex difference in the present study, although Hayes and McAdoo[11] did report that females were more likely to receive a ranking of 1.

The results relative to side are not clear. Our findings agree with those in previous studies in that side was not related to winning. On the other hand it appears to be to the advantage of the individual debater to be on the affirmative side because members of this side were more likely to receive a rank of one or two.

It is difficult to explain the fact that although there is no overall advantage in winning with regard to side, affirmative debaters are more likely to receive a rank of 1 or 2. This apparent inconsistency may be caused by the fact that, although the affirmative side is more likely to receive a 1 or 2 rank overall, the negative side is more likely to win in split decisions; therefore, these factors may be balanced in an overall comparison of negative to affirmative. Since there was no difference in quality points related to side, the teams were evenly matched. The fact that negative teams won more rounds when split decisions occurred may reflect the impact of the negative presumption in debate when the teams are closely matched.

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[8] Hensley and Strother, pp. 236-237.

[9] Hayes and McAdoo, pp. 129-131.

[10] Hensley and Strother, pp. 236-237.

[11] Hayes and McAdoo, p. 129.

Position of course could not be examined in relation to winning since each side contains both positions, but it does appear to be an advantage to the individual to have the second position since the chances of receiving a higher rank are better in that position. There are several posible explanations for this result. Overall, the second speaker is the last to be heard by the judge and the recency effect is more important than the primacy effect in determining the attitudes of an audience. The second negative speaker has more time than the first negative speaker to prepare his arguments before speaking, which probably would lead to a more polished and well organized presentation which in turn may result in a higher rank. Most first affirmatives are prepared speeches and often the second affirmative is the better overall debater of the two, which might lead judges to rank second affirmatives over first affirmatives.

The use of quality points in evaluating the effects of non-skill factors in debate appears to be limited. These scores were not significantly related to sex, side or position in the present study and the mean ratings presented by Wise[12] did not clearly vary in relation to side or position.

The information presented in the present study concerning the probability of winning in a situation where the teams are tied in terms of ranks (1 and 4 vs. 2 and 3) is limited, but it suggests that a very good debater can be safely paired with a mediocre one since the team with the first ranked speaker is twice as likely to win.

In summary, there is no difference between male and female teams with regard to winning, but mixed teams are more likely to win. Position does not have an effect on winning yet it is advantageous to be a second speaker. Finally, the negative side has an advantage in a split decision, although speakers on the affirmative side are more likely to receive a high rank.

[12] Wise, pp. 306-307.

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